

Series: **The Original**  
Today's Title: **"Herod's Persecution"**

October 10, 2021 – Acts 11:27-12:19

---

**Objective:** To help people realize the power and plan of God is sovereign.

---

*Opening prayer*

Does life go according to your plan?

In Jr. High, my best friend and I used to talk about our future - and we would go to Alaska or some other untamed wilderness and live off the grid - hunting and trapping animals.

I was a Chicago suburban kid who never really went hunting or trapping - and how I ever thought I could do that - or would enjoy that - I don't know.

I also used to have aspirations of being an athlete - a baseball player.

However, I didn't grow until after H.S. - so no scholarships ever knocked on my door - as a 145 lb. H.S. senior.

Plans:

"Always plan for the fact that no plan ever goes according to plan."

"No battle was ever won according to plan, but no battle was ever won without one." - *Dwight D. Eisenhower*

Jesus gave His followers a plan.

We call it the Great Commission.

We find variations of it in all 4 Gospels - and in **Acts 1:8**.

You could say that was/is the plan for the building of His Church.

Jesus gave us the plan.

That's one of the primary things we've seen as we've walked through the first 12 chapters of Acts.

As we've looked at the "Original" Church, we have seen the intentional, intense, ongoing work of those first Christians to take the message of Jesus to those who didn't know about Jesus.

**Turn to Acts 11:27 - 12:19** (p. 920-921)

In our passage today we're going to see the Church was obedient - and busy - following the plan Jesus gave.

But we're also going to see that just because there's a plan, that doesn't mean things work smoothly.

We're going to see that disaster, loss, pain is experienced by those who are following God's plan.

That's simply part of living in a sinful, fallen world.

As followers of Christ - as Christians - as a local church - Christ has commissioned us as He did His disciples - to make disciples - baptize them - teach them the truth of Christ - and the cycle keeps repeating.

And just like those first disciples - and the Christians in the first decades of the Church - we obey Jesus' command - but we do so in a world that is opposed to Him - a world that

contains danger and disease - a fallen world in which pain and suffering are unavoidable.

But - we press on - knowing that this world is not our home - and as we work at bringing the Gospel to the world, we are building and investing in our eternal home.

Let's look at our passage today - and the first thing we see is:

**Christians helping other Christians.** vs. 27-30

### **Read vs. 27-30**

Agabus is predicting a famine that would take place soon.

Luke, writing after these events took place, tells us parenthetically that this famine happened during the reign of Emperor Claudius who ruled the Roman Empire from 41-54 A.D.

Claudius extended Roman rule into northern Africa and made current day Britain a province.

Churches helping other churches.

Sometimes, churches can be focused on their own 'turf'.

Churches can view other churches as 'competition'.

If another church struggles, the reaction of Christians in nearby churches is sometimes, *"Good, maybe some of those people will start to attend our church."*

To be clear: This is not good - this is not healthy.

***We need to have a 'Kingdom Perspective'.***

We need to realize other Bible-believing, Christ-honoring churches are on the same team we are - we're working and praying for the same things - more people to put their faith in Christ.

More families nurtured, more marriages saved and thriving, more kids raised in love.

**I want to commend you.**

You all - most recently through our partnership the last 3 years with Hope City - and throughout the years in many other ways - have demonstrated that you see through a Kingdom lens.

That's what we see here in **vs. 29-30**.

The church in Antioch gathers donations to help the churches in Jerusalem who will face great hardships with this famine.

After the funds are collected, they have Barnabas and Saul take it to the church leaders in Jerusalem.

It's a great picture - and example - of churches helping other churches who are in need.

Then, in **chapter 12**, Luke's account shifts focus - and we're taken to the scene in Jerusalem.

**King Herod Agrippa attacks the Apostles.** *vs. 1-5*

A short bio on King Herod Agrippa...

Herod Agrippa was the grandson of Herod the Great.

Agrippa came to power through the usual soap opera of Roman politics and assassinations.

He first came to power over the regions of Syria in 37 A.D. - and a few years later the territories of Galilee and Peraea were placed under his rule.

In 41 A.D., when Claudius was made emperor, Claudius placed Judea under Herod Agrippa's power.

Of all the other members of the Herodian dynasty, Agrippa was the most popular among the Jews.

To maintain or increase his popularity with the Jewish people - especially the Jewish ruling class, Herod decided to make the Apostles a primary target.

### **Read vs. 1-5**

The inner circle that Jesus had were the 3 disciples: Peter, James, and John. James and John were brothers - the sons of Zebedee.

Jesus also had a brother named James, who had become the leader of the church in Jerusalem - and he would eventually write the N.T. book of James. We'll see him in just a bit.

James - who was the first martyr from among the Apostles (vs. 2) was the brother of John, and one of Zebedee's sons.

Herod realized that murdering James pleased the Jews, so he targets the lead Apostle. Peter - and arrests him.

vs. 3 - the “days of Unleavened Bread” - this is another name for Passover (Luke 22:1), and it was a major Jewish religious festival which lasted 7 days.

Since Herod had Peter arrested during the festival, it would not be a good public relations move to have Peter executed during the festival - it was illegal under Jewish law.

So, his plan is to hold Peter in prison - under heavy guard - until the festival is over - and then he will bring him out and execute him.

**But King Herod didn't know the real power Christians had at their disposal.**

Herod placed 4 “squads of soldiers to guard him” - expecting that the other followers of Jesus might try and break Peter out of prison.

**But Herod didn't know the power of prayer - and he couldn't do anything to combat the power of prayer!**

On the last night of the festival, Christians continued in their prayers - their “earnest prayer” Luke tells us.

It seems they had been praying the entire time that Peter had been arrested and imprisoned.

The Christians probably realize since this was the last night of the festival, tomorrow would be Peter's execution. I'm sure Peter knew this also.

So, they were earnestly praying.

**Little did they know that while they were praying, God was answering their prayers.**

- When you pray - do you expect an answer?
- Do you expect God will be silent?
- Does your expectation affect how "earnest" your prayers are?

**God answers prayer with power.** vs. 6-11

**Read vs. 6-11**

Peter is sleeping - chained to a soldier on his left - and one on his right - and there were 2 other soldiers at the door.

vs. 7 - An "angel of the Lord" appears in the prison cell - his presence lights up the room but doesn't wake the soldiers who are chained to Peter.

The angel "struck Peter on the side".

When I first read this, I laughed. This is not some nice, gentle rousing from his sleep.

He isn't touching Peter's shoulder and gently nudging him to wake up.

He strikes Peter on the side - the Greek term here is often translated '*strike down*' or '*smite*'.

This is no gentle tap - it's a pretty good blow!!

**Also...it's interesting...on the night before he will be executed...Peter is...deep in sleep!**

So deep, that the angel has to clock him to wake him!

The angel tells Peter to "Get up quickly".

The chains fall off Peter's hands.

At the angel's command Peter gets dressed - puts on his sandals - and the angel says, "follow me."

vs. 9 - Peter follows the angel - but he thinks this is a vision.

vs. 10 - Peter and the angel pass the 1<sup>st</sup> set of guards - then the 2<sup>nd</sup> set of guards - then the big iron gate - the 'front door' of the prison - and it opens on its own - and they walk right out onto one of the streets.

"...immediately that angel left him."

**Do you sleepwalk?**

I don't - but this is the picture in my head.

It's like Peter was thinking he was seeing a vision - like he was sleepwalking - the angel instantly departs - and in an instant Peter is fully awake and looking around with the expression that says,

*'How did I get here?'*

*'Why is the ½ gallon of ice cream in my hand?'*



No... Peter isn't sleepwalking.

This was real. This wasn't a dream.

vs. 11 - “When Peter came to himself” - Gr: *‘ginomai’* - When he became aware - came to his full senses - he realizes that God has rescued him from King Herod - “and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.”

The Jewish people were bloodthirsty - expecting a mock trial followed by another execution - this time it would be Peter's head to roll around on the ground!

**But Herod didn't realize the power of prayer.**

- Don't ever dismiss the power of prayer.
- Don't ever dismiss the attentiveness of God to your prayers.
- God doesn't always answer our prayers in the way we want.

I'm sure the Christians had prayed about James also - but God allowed James to be martyred.

I can't explain that.

I don't know why God allowed that.

But it was part of His divine providence - His good and perfect plan.

But God answers their prayers for Peter in the affirmative.

But they would struggle believing it!!!

**Read vs. 12-15**

**The believers don't believe.** vs. 12-15

Now fully awake in the cool night air, Peter goes where he knows some other Christians will be - to Mark's mom's house.

Mark - sometimes referred to as John-Mark - who wrote the Gospel of Mark - it's his mom's house that is hosting an all-night prayer vigil.

They've been praying here - and likely in other homes for the duration of Peter's imprisonment.

He goes to the house - it must have had an outer door - in an outer courtyard by the street - and that is where we find Peter knocking.

vs. 13 - A servant girl, Rhoda, came to the door to answer. This is hilarious.

She hears Peter's voice - and gets so excited at the sound of his voice that she runs into the house to tell everyone, *'Peter is here!!!'*

In her excitement she fails to open the door - leaving Peter standing outside - no doubt looking nervously over each shoulder - wondering if Roman soldiers are going to come around the corner looking for their escapee! Rhoda runs into the house and tells everyone that Peter is at the gate.

vs. 15 - They said to her, "You are out of your mind."

But isn't this what they had been praying?  
Weren't they praying that Peter would be released?  
Now they're told he is standing at the gate - and they tell  
this servant girl that she's crazy!

- What kind of answers do you expect when you pray?
- Do you have confidence that God can answer your prayers?
- Do you pray - bringing your requests before God - and at the same time acknowledging that you will accept God's will - His answer - even if it's not what you're asking for?

Thankfully, Rhoda was insistent.

They didn't believe her but said '*You heard his angel.*'

I wonder how long this internal debate about the ability of God to answer their prayers lasted.

**God shatters expectations.** vs. 16-19

**Read vs. 16-19**

Peter kept knocking - so they open the door.

*Wow!!! It's Peter!!! Rhoda - why didn't you say so???*

Peter tells them what happened - how the Lord had sent an angel to bust him out of prison.

This was likely a short visit, because once his absence was noticed, Herod would certainly send out a search party to look for him - starting in all the homes of the

known Christians - and Mary's house was likely on their list.

Peter tells them to relay “these things to James and to the brothers.”

Wait... wasn't James martyred earlier?

Yes. James, one of Zebedee's sons, was martyred (vs. 2).

The James Peter is referring to was James the brother of Jesus.

As I mentioned earlier, James, the brother of Jesus - who became a believer in Jesus after the resurrection, eventually became the primary leader of the church in Jerusalem.

Peter wants to make sure that James - and the “brothers” - meaning the other leaders and Apostles who were still in Jerusalem - knew about the events that led to his freedom.

**vs. 17b** - “Then he (Peter) departed and went to another place.”

Where did Peter go?

Nobody knows.

He disappears - He put on his hoodie - disappeared into the dark night - and went into hiding until the imminent threat from Herod passed.

Luke has a way of understating things - which he does here.

**vs. 18** - “there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter.”

In the morning - the soldiers are freaking out. Peter is gone!! How did this happen??

Soldiers were responsible for the prisoner they were guarding.

If the prisoner escaped, it was assumed that either the soldier fell asleep on duty - or he accepted a bribe.

To prevent these things from happening within the military, soldiers would normally be executed when a prisoner escaped.

vs. 19 - Herod searches for Peter - but he is nowhere to be found. Herod turns his attention to the soldiers and has them executed.

Herod then leaves Jerusalem and goes to Caesarea - where we'll pick up the account next week.

### ***Apply it...***

Prayer connects us to the power of God.

Prayer is not simply a religious thing.

Prayer is talking to the God of the universe!!

Prayer is entering the throne room of God.

- Be assured - God hears your prayers.
- Expect - that God will answer your prayers.
- Be confident in God's answer - even if it's 'No' or 'Not Yet'.

Gospel ministry includes hardship and pain.

This passage doesn't hide the reality of living out God's mission in this world.

Being faithful to God doesn't remove us from the fallen world we inhabit.

When you experience hardship and pain - know that God is sovereign - and He is working in and through the hardship and pain.

The Original plan for the Church is still the best plan.

The plan Jesus gave His disciples is our plan too.

Make Disciples - baptize them - teach the truths of Christ - keep repeating.

Simple. Not easy. Pain and hardship will be involved.

But it's the best plan - because it's God's plan.

*Close in prayer*